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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 02/05/08

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- (1) LDP gearing up for determining official candidates

Over two years have passed since the September 2005 "postal election." The Liberal Democratic Party has begun making serious efforts to determine its official candidates running in single-seats in the next House of Representatives election. The LDP is trying to take the initiative in the political situation by applying pressure on the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), although Lower House dissolution is no longer imminent because the ruling and opposition camps have cut a deal temporarily on the question of the provisional gasoline tax rate. At the same time, given the divided Diet in which the House of Councillors is controlled by the opposition camp, the LDP is highly alarmed that a failure to amicably coordinate views on endorsing winning candidates might result in a change in government.

Seiko Noda, 46, chairperson of the LDP research commission on consumer issues, attended a Setsubun (bean-throwing) ceremony at a temple in the city of Gifu on Feb. 3 in which she proudly said: "It's been 15 years since I was first elected to the Diet. All those years have been filled with ups and downs. Although the scare of frozen gyoza dumplings laced with pesticide is shaking the country, I am in charge of the matter (in the LDP)."

Opposing (then Prime Minister Koizumi's) postal privatization plan, Noda ran in the previous Lower House election as an independent and won a seat in the Gifu No. 1 constituency. After rejoining the party, she also engaged in psychological warfare with Yukari Sato, 46, who had won a seat under the proportional representation segment in the previous election. Noda ultimately won informal endorsement

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in January for the next race. Evidenced by her report on her efforts for consumer issues to Prime Minister Fukuda, who has a deep interest in consumer administration, there is a growing presence of Noda in the Diet at Nagatacho.

Meanwhile, Sato's support association on Jan. 30 presented LDP headquarters with signatures of 22,000 voters opposing the lawmaker's move from the Gifu No. 1 constituency. Her support group executive said: "(Official endorsement of) Ms. Noda by the party would throw LDP supporters in the city of Gifu into turmoil. Some might even throw their support behind the DPJ." Sato, too, said: "I will conduct activities in Gifu until a formal decision is made."

Party endorsement coordination work gained momentum in mid-January when LDP Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga commented: "Ms. Noda is closer to victory (than Ms. Sato). I'm hoping to find a new electoral district for her in February." The party leadership eyes announcing Sato's new electoral district at her fundraising party on Feb. 11.

In the country, there are six constituencies, including Gifu No. 1 district, where former "postal rebels" are vying for party endorsement with postal supporters salvaged under the proportional representation system. Former "postal rebel" Shunichi Yamaguchi, 57, indicated at his fundraising party that he had learned from a party executive of the party's likelihood to endorse him for the Tokushima No. 2 district, instead of Akira Shichijo, 56, who represents the proportional representation bloc.

The battle between the ruling and opposition camps over road-construction revenues ended without plunging into "Diet dissolution in January," and the DPJ has shifted its focus to the fall or beyond. Why is the LDP still stepping up efforts to determine candidates centering on shoo-ins?

It is obviously because the LDP is trying to apply pressure on the DPJ, which is ill-prepared for the next election. At the same time, if coordination work drags on, LDP candidates might get in each other's way and end up paving the way for a DPJ administration.

LDP headquarters envisages the Tokyo No. 5 district for Sato. The

local chapter pins high hopes on Sato, who has high name recognition and is a native of Setagaya Ward. The chapter decided at its meeting yesterday to make arrangements for accepting Sato.

Sato's entry into the Tokyo No. 5 race has come as a surprise to the DPJ. Yoshio Tezuka, 41, who lost his seat in the previous election, noted: "I'm sure I will feel a lot of stress when vying with Ms. Sato."

Coordination efforts have bogged down in the Yamanashi No. 2 and No. 3 districts.

At a meeting with the municipal assembly late last year, former General Council Chairman Mitsuo Horiuchi, 78, a former postal rebel who was reputed to retire from politics, declared that he would run in the Yamanashi second district. Kotaro Nagasaki, 39, who holds a proportional representation seat, is also determined to devote himself to the same district.

The LDP Election Strategy Council thinks Nagasaki has momentum, although he was defeated by Horiuchi by a mere 900 votes in the

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previous race but later won over 1,000 party members. The party's independent election surveys reportedly also showed Nagasaki's dominance. But the election council cannot ignore the wish of Horiuchi, a former party executive.

A battle is also underway in the Yamanashi No. 3 constituency between Takeshi Hosaka, 63, a former postal rebel, and Jiro Ono, 54, a former secretary to former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Ono has recently increased the membership of his support organization 1.5 fold to 4,500. In the previous race, however, DPJ lawmaker Hitoshi Goto, 50, came in second by collecting about 2,000 votes more than Hosaka. Ono came in third. If Hosaka and Ono again run in the next race, they might go down together.

In the Fukuoka No. 11 district, Ryota Takeda, 39, and Kozo Yamamoto, 59, are likely to vie for party endorsement for the fourth time.

In the Shizuoka No. 7 constituency, Minoru Kiuchi, 42, who lost his seat in the previous race, is expected to run as an independent against Satsuki Katayama, 48, who won party endorsement in the previous race. Party headquarters plans to endorse incumbents but it has not jettisoned the option of additionally endorsing postal rebels if they won.

Party headquarters is also having a hard time in determining the treatment of the incumbents who won proportional representation seats without running in single-seat constituencies.

Former Minister of State for Declining Birthrate Kuniko Inoguchi, 55, who was placed at the top of the LDP proportional representation list for the Tokyo bloc, has played up her presence, holding a party to celebrate the publication of her recent book. However, it has not been decided whether she will run in the race from a single-seat constituency. There is a talk that Taku Otsuka, 34, who won a seat despite his being tanked the 29th on the party's proportional list for the Tokyo bloc, will run in the Tokyo No. 5 district. Yukari Sato is likely to move there, however.

Taizo Sugimura, 28, of the southern Kanto bloc, a graduate of a Sapporo high school, aims to move to the Hokkaido No. 1 district with no LDP candidate. But unhappy with his comment to run in the No. 1 district even as an independent, the local chapter is backing Gaku Hasegawa, 36, a founder of the Soran Festival.

Sugimura, along with Sato, is a symbol of "Koizumi's children." An LDP executive indicated that fielding Sugimura against the DPJ's possible candidate, Takahiro Yokomichi, a former Lower House Vice-Speaker, would help bring about a favorable wind for the party's overall election campaign.

Meanwhile, the Hokkaido chapter is alarmed at New Party Daichi Representative Muneo Suzuki's contact with Sugimura. If Sugimura

runs in the constituency backed by Daichi, Hasegawa would have to compete with him. "Mr. Sugimura's determination is firm to run in the race, but we cannot overturn the local decision at this point." Unable to file a request with party headquarters for endorsing Hasegawa, the Hokkaido chapter is troubled.

(2) Respective interests of ruling, opposition parties  
criss-crossing over talks to revise special-purpose road  
construction revenues

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NIKKEI (Page 2) (Almost full)  
February 5, 2008

The ruling and opposition parties have yet to decide what approach to take to Diet deliberations on special-purpose road construction revenues, which are expected to move into full gear shortly. The Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ or Minshuto) strategy is to focus on the abolition of the provisional gasoline tax rate and reallocation of road funds. However, DPJ members remain cautious about the proposed talks to revise the ruling parties' bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law due in part to their alarm about their agreement leading to a "grand coalition." Many Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members of the road policy clique in the Diet are strongly resisting holding revision talks with the opposition parties. The cautious argument is slightly outdoing the positive argument.

DPJ to submit bill to reallocate road funds for other uses: Still alert to grand coalition initiative

Calling for reallocations of road funds for other uses, the DPJ is determined to thoroughly pursue the appropriateness of the government's mid-term plan to inject approximately 59 trillion yen in the construction of roads over the next 10 years. It intends to submit to the Diet a bill scrapping the road construction revenues special exemption law and a bill abolishing the system of local governments sharing the burden of government-controlled road construction or river works for the purpose of making up for approximately 900 billion yen in a tax revenue shortfall that local governments are expected to suffer as a result of its proposal for abolishing the provisional tax rate.

The Lower House speaker and the Upper House president recently brokered a deal between the ruling and opposition camp. The agreement reached between the two camps, which noted that a certain degree of conclusion be reached on the bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law before the end of this fiscal year, included the consensus that the legislature is to make changes to matters on which each party agreed.

Because the government proposal is now likely to be adopted by the end of March, some senior DPJ members are calling for searching for a way to revise the amendment bill in order to achieve as much as possible, when the provisional gas tax rate expires. Tadayoshi Ichita, head of the Japanese Communist Party Secretariat told a news conference on Jan. 4, "I do not think revising the bill is a mistake if it is done in a manner that would benefit the public."

However, one senior Upper House member underscored, "We should not settle for a cross between our bill and the ruling party-sponsored bill." DPJ members are caught on the horns of dilemma with many of them still alert to the possibility of the proposed revision talks leading to a reemergence of the old "grand coalition" initiative.

Ruling parties

LDP Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki during a press conference on Jan. 4 made an ironical remark on the DPJ's stance toward special-purpose road construction revenues, saying, "The DPJ is projecting an image of its being a party with a foggy policy. Regarding a revision of the ruling parties' bill amending the Special Tax Measures Law, he

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stressed, "We have no intention whatsoever of calling on the DPJ to come to the negotiating table." Hidehisa Otsuji, chairman of the LDP Caucus in the Upper House during a press conference categorically said, "It is illogical for the ruling party to propose revision talks right now."

An argument approving revisions to the bill has surfaced in the ruling camp, reflecting a cooperative mood generated after the ruling and opposition parties reached an agreement on the provisional gas tax rate. However, if talks with the opposition camp get to specific arguments, such as shortening the period to maintain the provisional tax rate from 10 years or expanding road funds subject to reallocations for other uses, ruling party members, mainly those involved in the road policy, are bound to put up resistance. The argument positive about holding revision talks is swiftly losing steam among leadership members with one noting, "It would be wiser for the DPJ to determine what approach it will take."

Members of the road policy clique in the Diet are stepping up their offensive. General Council Chairman Toshihiro Nikai on Jan. 4 met with Ibuki and Diet Policy Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima and pressed them not to revise the bill. Highways Research Commission Chairman Yuji Yamamoto the same day opposed a plan to shorten the period to retain the provisional tax rate, noting, "The issue should not be decided in a matter of one or two months."

Deputy DPJ Chairman Naoto Kan criticized Nikai, saying, "It is visible from his face that he is determined not to give up on his vested interests." The ruling camp also intends to pursue Kan on this issue. The LDP on Jan. 4 submitted to Kan a paper seeking a correction of his remark and an apology and asked him to reply by the evening of the 5th.

(3) Suprapartisan group, including Kato, Yamasaki, to visit South Korea - aiming to pave way for political realignment?

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 2, 2008

A suprapartisan group, including Liberal Democratic Party members Koichi Kato and Taku Yamasaki, will visit South Korea on Feb. 10-11. The lawmakers are scheduled to meet president-elect Lee Myung Bak in Seoul on the 11th. The group will be formed by more than 10 lawmakers from the LDP, the New Komeito, the Democratic Party of Japan, the Social Democratic Party, and other political parties. Seeing this, some observers speculate that the visit might be intended to pave the way for rallying together liberal forces, with an eye on a fluid political situation after a next House of Representatives election.

Kato and Yamasaki met Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday and explained the purpose of their planned visit to South Korea. Fukuda said: "I think the visit by a suprapartisan group is good. I expect some positive results will be produced in the visit." DPJ members Yoshito Sengoku and Yukio Edano, and SDP member Kiyomi Tsujimoto are also members of the delegation.

Kato said: "A suprapartisan group should discuss sensitive diplomatic issues with the other side," emphasizing the significance of the delegation. The participation of the DPJ members, who have distanced themselves from President Ichiro Ozawa, has touched off

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speculation. One delegate commented: "This is a group of those keeping their distance from Mr. Ozawa."

(4) Outcome of Iwakuni mayoralty race and Lower House by-election to be touchstone for Abe's resurgence

SENTAKU (Page 45) (Full)  
February 2008

In February, a mayoralty election will be held in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, to fill the post that fell vacant due to the resignation

of former Mayor Katsusuke Ihara, who opposes the U.S. plan to relocate carrier-based fighter jets to U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni. There will also be held a House of Representatives by-election in April for the Yamaguchi No.2 electoral district. The outcome of these two races may provide a clue as to whether former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who hails from Yamaguchi Prefecture, will be able to return to the center stage of politics.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has fielded former Lower House member Yoshihiko Fukuda, an Iwakuni native, as the rival candidate against Ihara, who will run again in the mayoralty race. Incumbent Lower House member Hideo Hiraoka of the Democratic Party of Japan, who was elected in the proportional representation Chugoku bloc of the 2005 Lower House election after being defeated by Fukuda in the Yamaguchi No. 2 single-seat constituency, will run in the upcoming by-election for the Diet seat vacated by Fukuda. Although the LDP has not picked any candidate for the Lower House by-election, the names of two House of Councillors members -- Nobuo Kishi, Abe's younger brother, and Yoshimasa Hayashi -- have been already floated as possible candidates.

Ihara, who overwhelmingly won the previous mayoral race, is a strong candidate. Since the DPJ's Hiraoka, now a candidate for the Lower House by-election, was defeated by a narrow margin by Fukuda, the LDP cannot take the race lightly. For Abe, who has resumed his official duties, the LDP's victory in both elections would become a touchstone for his resurgence. Former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori has reportedly fired Abe up by saying: "We have to win both elections under your initiative."

(5) LDP's Yamasaki expects Prime Minister's assurance of visit to North Korea

SENTAKU (Page 45) (Full)  
February 2008

Taku Yamasaki, former vice president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has been feeling out the right timing for him to make a visit to North Korea. He set up a sub-commission in the party's Foreign Affairs Research Commission, which he chairs, and picked former defense chief Seijuro Eto, who has close ties with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, to chair the sub-committee. He is full of bluster, saying: "I want to get the Prime Minister's assurance so that I will be able to do something to resolve the abduction issue."

It was Yamasaki who engineered the second visit to Pyongyang by then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in 2004. Reportedly, Yamasaki's cold shoulder to Fukuda at that time led to the resignation of Fukuda as chief cabinet secretary. However, Yamasaki and Fukuda, who are both 72, were classmates at Waseda University. When they were

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college students, they met at Fukuda's home since their fathers, graduates of the University of Tokyo, were friends.

Fukuda heaped accolades on Yamasaki in a meeting he attended at the beginning of this year, saying: "I have been associated with Mr. Yamasaki for a half century. He has given me guidance regarding North Korean issues." Yamasaki is likely making approaches to Fukuda's aides, saying: "It is time for the Prime Minister to put me to good use."

(6) Kazamidori (Weathercock) column: Japan will be forced to choose between U.S. and China, if the latter is democratized

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
February 3, 2008

Katsuji Nakazawa

Peking University is a major player in China's modern history. Late last year, when Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda was visiting China, he addressed students at this university. In the speech, the prime minister expounded on Japanese politics in a way that was easy for the students to understand by citing the so-called "political war"

between Kakuei Tanaka and Fukuda's father Takeo Fukuda (who both served as prime ministers in the 1970s). Fukuda then expressed words of regret about past events (between Japan and China) and received a good response. The hidden focus of his speech was how to refer to human rights and other aspects of democracy at a bastion for China's pro-democracy movement. Whether rising China becomes a democratic nation has a new meaning for Japan.

"It is important to pursue together such universal values as human rights, rule of law, and democracy. On the other hand, I think it is likewise important to pay attention to the common foundation and values embedded deeply in Japan and China."

These remarks were modest compared with those previously uttered by American presidents, but Fukuda was the first Japanese prime minister to speak to Chinese students about democracy. By referring to Confucianism, a set of values both Japan and China hold in common, Fukuda drew a clear distinction from the former Abe administration's "value-oriented diplomacy," which emphasized shared values with the United States like democracy.

With its economy growing, China has already become Japan's largest trading partner. The recent frenzy over tainted frozen "gyoza" dumplings that had come from China in this sense symbolizes the economic interdependence between the two countries. According to a private-sector forecast, China's gross domestic product (GDP) will outpace Japan's in five years, even though what will China's economic prospects once the 2008 Beijing Olympics are over are unknown. The existence of China as a major military power that is likely to become the world's second largest economic power in the 2020s could change the security dynamics in the region. However, even in such a case, Japan's conclusion would be that the Japan-U.S. alliance will remain the axis of its bilateral relations. In other words, Japan remains crucial to security in Asia since its sits between the U.S. and China. Japan will defend the alliance with the U.S., with which Japan shares values, and in so doing, forestall China.

But what should Japan do if its neighboring big power is

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democratized? Such a China would force Japan to choose between the U.S. and it, given the similar traditional culture and political systems both countries inherit. Should China (become a democratic nation), the U.S., too, would revise its previous views of China. Calls for a review of Japan's continuing dependence on the U.S. since the end of World War II would gain momentum in Japan, even though it is not that Japan would be simply forced to choose between the U.S. and China.

Two years ago, an exchange meeting was held in Beijing between the ruling parties of the two countries. Hidenao Nakagawa, then chair of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Policy Research Council, suggested gently to Li Zhongshu, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee for Propaganda of the Communist Party of China: "I hope China will follow a democratic process in a moderate manner." But the Chinese side made no response to this proposal.

The question of when elections will be held is talked about in China, but China is highly cautious about political reform. The day after Fukuda's speech, China approved Hong Kong having a direct election of its administrator in 2017. This move would inevitably spill over into the Chinese continent.

One young Chinese researcher was filled with expectation: "The road for China to reach the top in the economic area in 2017 is now visible. I think there will be a kind of experiment in Hong Kong, with China itself gradually shifting to a democratic country in years after 2020, when it would achieve the goal of turning a society where the public realizes affluence." A Japanese official concerned with Japan-China diplomatic relations predicts that a significant change will emerge around 2020. This official continued: "Those who spent their days freely as college students and who experienced the pro-democracy movement after the Great Cultural Revolution will become senior members of the Communist Party of China its Conventions in 2017 and in 2022. Political reform without

fail would then begin."

The government's foreign policy has been affected by the Japanese public's views of other countries. Regarding the Japanese public's sense of identity, Tatsuru Uchida, professor at Kobe College, noted: "(The Japanese public) shifted the 'national object of desire' from China to the U.S. in the 1850s" (in his book *Gaijo no America Ron* (Views of America on Japanese streets). Japan since the dawn of history until the recent modern times was aware of the existence of a strong power on the Asian Continent, but with Commodore Perry's arrival in Japan, Japan abandoned the declining Qing state. Japan since the Meiji Era (1868-1912) has flattered itself that it has risen to the top in Asia. All the more for that reason, Japan is somewhat embarrassed at the thought that somewhere down the road its status in the international community will be slip back.

Fukuda is viewed as a pro-Chinese politician, but according to an aide, "Even he realized through his recent overseas trip the rise in China's influence and the decline in Japan's status." He therefore set up a panel of experts to discuss how the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) should take the diplomatic lead. One subject for discussion there will be China.

An important question for Japan will be what to do if China outstrips Japan on the economic front. The current mutually beneficial strategic partnership would then reach the end of its shelf life. For Japan, then, it is indispensable to envision the

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long-term case of China becoming a democratic country. Who could predict 19 years ago, when the Tiananmen Square Incident occurred, that China would become an economic power today? The same holds true of the possible emergence of a pro-democratic China.

(7) Risks cannot be completely removed through blanket BSE testing

ASAHI (Page 4) (Slightly abridged)  
February 4, 2008

A number of Japanese people believe that Japanese beef is safer than U.S. beef, because Japan requires all cattle to be tested to prevent BSE before they are slaughtered. Many people believe that Japan has introduced the most rigorous inspection system in the world.

Hideaki Karaki, an honorary professor at the University of Tokyo, pointed out in an article carried in a magazine issued by the Japan Veterinary Medical Association last June: "It is not well known that there is a possibility of infected cows being overlooked even with blanket testing."

The U.S. and Europe subject only cattle 30 months of age or older to BSE testing. In the U.S., only some of such cattle are tested.

In the case of calves to which BSE-prone meat-and-bone meal was given, abnormal prions concentrate first in some parts of the small intestine and then slowly build up in the brain. In six months before infected cows begin to show symptoms, abnormal prions increase to a level high enough to be confirmed by BSE testing.

In Britain, more than 170,000 cases of BSE have been reported. The average age when symptoms began to appear in the cattle was 60 months, with cases of the start of symptoms at less than 30 months of age only totaling 81 cows. Calculations show that only one out of every 2,000 infected cows were found infected with the disease at the age of under 30 months.

Following the first discovery of the first case of BSE in Japan in September 2001, the government in its draft plan on a new inspection system set the minimum age of cattle subject to testing at 30 months. But the government decided to introduce a blanket testing system, reflecting growing calls from some lawmakers, although few countries have adopted the system. It was a political judgment for the sake of putting people "at ease." The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has decided to finally review the blanket testing system this summer, but an increasing number of local governments have decided to independently continue blanket testing.



Of the abnormal prions, 99 PERCENT are accumulated in the brain or vertebral columns. In Western countries, removal of all specified risk materials (SRM) is mandatory.

Japanese meat-processing plants also remove SRMs, but this requirement is regarded as no more than "support for BSE testing." That was why Japan and the U.S. long remained far apart in negotiations on Japan's resumption of U.S. beef imports.

A set of international standards for BSE measures determined by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) includes: (1) removal of SRMs; and (2) prohibiting the practice of pithing. No provisions for testing are included in the criteria. Pithing is a slaughtering technique in which the brain of the animal is scrambled with a rod

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stuck into the stun hole to reduce or eliminate reflex kicking as the animal dies. But Western countries ban pithing on animals intended for human consumption because it may lead to the spread of fragments of neural matter throughout the carcass.

In Japan, however, slaughterhouses still carry out the practice of pithing. Yoshihiro Ozawa, honorary advisor to the OIE, commented: "The government has conducted no satisfactory testing to check if all SRMs were removed. The practice of pithing continues even now."

Based on the international standards, OIE classifies countries' BSE countermeasures into three ranks. The U.S. is included in the 2nd rank - countries having controlled BSE risk - but Japan and Britain are in the third category - countries with undetermined risk of BSE. Only the Japanese people are unwitting of this fact.

(8) Increasing food self-sufficiency ratio to 45 PERCENT extremely difficult due to shrinking arable land

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Full)  
February 5, 2008

Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio has dropped to the lowest level among the industrialized countries. A primary reason for this is that consumption of rice, a commodity that Japan can supply its own needs, is on the decrease, while consumption of Western foods, most of which such as meat are imported from abroad, is on the increase. A second factor is the government's inability to respond well to the declining agriculture sector and the changing needs of consumers. The government aims to increase the food self-sufficiency ratio on a calorie supply basis to 45 PERCENT by 2015, but reaching this goal will be extremely difficult indeed.

Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio is remarkably low, compared to other major industrialized countries. For instance, the comparative figures in 2003 (fiscal 2003 for Japan) show that the food self-sufficiency ratios of the United States and Australia, both of which are food-exporters, exceed 100 PERCENT as one can expect, but even in Europe, countries other than Switzerland supply 50 PERCENT or more of their own needs. As an agricultural power, France's food self-sufficiency ratio comes to 122 PERCENT .

In the case of Japan, however, per capita consumption of its staple food, rice, has halved to an annual 61.0 kg as of fiscal 2006, compared to peak consumption of 118.3 kg in fiscal 1962. As for other grains, Japan depends highly on imports, with its self-sufficiency ratios for wheat and soybean being 13 PERCENT and 25 PERCENT , respectively. The tendency for consumers to move away from rice as a staple has had a significant impact on Japan's food self-sufficiency.

A rise in the consumption of beef, pork, and chicken also has affected Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio. With the gradual import liberalization of livestock products, a large number of low-priced products have become available in Japan.

Even though livestock are domestically raised, Japan must import 75 PERCENT of their feed, such as corn. Japan's self-sufficiency ratio for livestock, after taking into account the import ratio of feed,

is a mere 16 PERCENT .

Shortage of farmers

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Accompanying the return of high economic growth after World War II, the structure of the economy shifted from the primary sector -- agriculture and fisheries -- to mining and manufacturing and the service industry sectors.

The area of arable land, which is key to a viable food supply, declined to 4.65 million hectares in 2007 from the peak of 6.086 million hectares in 1961. With a serious shortage of farm hands, owing to the aging population, farmable acreage that is no longer cultivated has reached 390,000 hectares, which is equal to the area of Saitama Prefecture.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), 11 kg of forage crops are needed in order to produce 1 kg of beef or 7 kg of pork. In order for Japan to raise its food self-sufficiency ratio to 100 PERCENT , without changing the current eating habit by the Japanese, MAFF calculates that Japan needs some 17 million hectares of arable land, nearly four times as large as the current area of arable land, including that used to grow feed.

The government declared in its "Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan" (released in March 2005), which sets basic agriculture policy course for the future, that Japan will aim to improve its food self-sufficiency ratio to 45 PERCENT . This ratio will make it possible for Japan to secure per capita consumption of 2,020 kilocalories if potatoes are cultivated in portions of rice paddies and vegetable fields, even if imports of food were suspended.

Improving eating habits is crucial

It is, however, questionable whether Japan can attain the goal of 45 PERCENT .

For instance, MAFF has assumed that crop yields of major product items, such as rice, wheat, and feed per hectare will be improved by 3-20 percent from the previous year in order to make up for a decrease in the area of arable land to 4.5 million hectares.

MAFF also has assumed that the people will improve their eating habits by reducing fat intake, which is high in calories, and instead increasing their consumption of rice. But the reality is that the amount of fat the people consumed in fiscal 2006 increased from the previous year.

In addition, there are many other challenges for Japan to address besides improving the food self-sufficiency ratio.

For instance, the government restricts countries from which Japan imports wheat to three countries, namely, the United States, Canada, and Australia. But there are those who point out the need to broaden the number of countries from which wheat is imported. The government also stockpiles a 0.2-2.5-month supply of rice, wheat, and soybeans, but discussion of reviewing such a rainy day reserve has begun.

DONOVAN